

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau



544/80

(43) International Publication Date
26 August 2004 (26.08.2004)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2004/072250 A2

- (51) International Patent Classification⁷: C12N
- (21) International Application Number: PCT/US2004/003545
- (22) International Filing Date: 5 February 2004 (05.02.2004)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data:
60/445,539 6 February 2003 (06.02.2003) US
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- (81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.
- (84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).
- Published:
— without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report
- For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: GALACTURONOSYL TRANSFERASES, NUCLEIC ACIDS ENCODING SAME AND USES THEREFOR

(57) Abstract: The invention provides an isolated nucleic acid molecule encoding the polypeptide having galacturonosyltransferase (GalAT) activity. The *GALA T 1* disclosed represents the first pectin biosynthetic glycosyltransferase gene isolated from plants. The invention further provides 14 *GALAT* and 10 *GALAT*-like gene superfamily members. The identification of the *GALAT* gene superfamily offers new opportunities to modulate pectin synthesis *in vivo* and *in vitro* by modulating the *GALAT* gene, for example, transgenic plants that produce modified pectins can be generated by altering the *GALAT* gene. Since modified pectins are predicted to affect plant growth, development, and plant defense responses, the transgenic plants are expected to have improved agricultural value. The modified pectins isolated from such transgenic plants are useful as gelling and stabilizing agents in the food, nutraceutical, and pharmaceutical industries. The expressed proteins, and variants thereof, of the *GALAT* superfamily are useful to produce *in vitro* modified pectins of commercial value.

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